

April 14, 2020

From: Family Learning Solutions, Inc.
Lori Melman, Ph.D., LCSW-C

To: Montgomery County Council

Subject: Testimony regarding FY21 operating budget: Funding request advocated by Nonprofit Montgomery and specifically, Family Learning Solutions youth programs

I hope everyone is doing okay amid this unusual and unexpected crisis. I am particularly saddened about the families and individuals living in constant fear and experiencing emotional and physical abuse whether it be from domestic violence, parent to child or sibling to sibling abuse.

I would be amiss if I did not acknowledge the important and powerful work of mentoring girls.

I am grateful Family Learning Solutions established connections with girls prior to the school closing. We have continued speaking with our girls via virtual group sessions and I am optimistic these connections will continue through the summer and future school years. We focus on including mentors who themselves have survived abuse and partner with organizations serving persons currently affected by domestic violence.

Although it may seem self-serving at this time, as our organization offers group and individual mentoring and coaching sessions; the truth is, that, we are helping our youth equip themselves with the skill set necessary to reduce domestic violence in the future.

The skill set includes verbal assertiveness and vocabulary, emotional awareness, self-esteem, familiarity of being in a caring relationship and the ability to feel comfortable asking and receiving help. Our work has seen this first hand.

How will our girls gain these insights and skills now – BEFORE – they find themselves in a situation they don't know how or is extremely challenging to get out of?

An ounce of prevention can go a long way. I hope the county government can respect the value of mentoring. Group mentoring is a powerful and cost-efficient way to support youth now in order to prevent long-term adult agony. Additional funding will sustain relationships and allow a MCPS high school graduate to provide ESOL services within group mentoring to an additional group of girls.

Throughout the years, I have personally observed sibling to sibling abuse and heard from children describing verbal abuse in their homes. Working with pre-k--high school and adults who are alumni from our very first program, I have learned that connecting youth to caring professionals is perhaps the best way to reduce the number of persons in abusive relationships.

For these reasons, **please support the important advocacy work and recommendations of Nonprofit Montgomery and specifically, requests by Family Learning Solutions to expand vital connections with today's youth.** Thank you for your efforts during this public health crisis and consideration for future budget recommendations. Sincerely, Lori Melman